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Osamu Dazai

Translated by Allison Markin Powell

Modern Japanese Classics

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Waking up in the morning is always interesting. It reminds me of when we're playing hide-and-seek—I'm hidden crouching in the pitch-dark closet and suddenly Deko throws open the sliding door, sunlight pouring in as she shouts, "Found you!"—that dazzling glare followed by an awkward pause, and then, my heart pounding as I adjust the front of my kimono and emerge from the closet, I'm slightly self-conscious and then suddenly irritated and annoyed—it feels similar, but no, not quite like that, somehow even more unbearable. Sort of like opening a box, only to find another box inside, so you open that smaller box and again there's another box inside, and you open it, and one after another there are smaller boxes inside each other, so you keep opening them, seven or eight of them, until finally what's left is a tiny box the size of a small die, so you gently pry it open to find... nothing, it's empty—more like that feeling. Anyway, it's a lie when they say your eyes just blink awake. Bleary and cloudy, then as the starch gradually settles to the bottom and the skim rises to the top, at last my eyes wearily open. Mornings seem forced to me. So much sadness rises up, I can't bear it. I hate it, I really do. I'm an awful sight in the morning. My legs feel so exhausted that, already, I don't want to do a thing. I wonder if it's because I don't sleep well. It's a lie when they say you feel healthy in the morning. Mornings are grey. Always the same. Absolutely empty. Lying in bed each morning, I'm always so pessimistic. It's awful, really. All kinds of terrible regrets converge at once in my mind, and my heart stops up as I writhe in agony.

Mornings are torture.

"Father," I tried calling out softly. Feeling strangely embarrassed and happy, I got up and hastily folded up my bedding. As I hoisted it, I was startled to hear myself exclaim, Alley-oop! I have never thought that I was the kind of girl who would utter such an unrefined expression as "Alley-oop." It seems like the kind of thing an old lady would shout—"Alley-oop!" It's disgusting. Why would I have said such a thing? It's as if there were an old lady somewhere inside of me, and it makes me sick. I'll have to be careful from now on. I became deeply depressed then, like the time I was repelled by a stranger's uncouth gait only to realize I was walking in exactly the same manner.

I never have any confidence in the mornings.

I sat in front of the dressing mirror in my nightclothes. Peering at myself in the mirror without my glasses, my face looked sort of blurry and moist. My glasses are the thing I hate most about my face, but there are certain good things about glasses that other people might not understand. I like to take my glasses off and look out into the distance. Everything goes hazy, as in a dream, or like a zoetrope—it's wonderful. I can't see anything that's dirty. Only big things—vivid intense colors and light are all that enters my vision. I also like to take my glasses off and look at people. The faces around me, all of them, seem kind and pretty and smiling. What's more, when my glasses are off, I don't ever think about arguing with anyone at all, nor do I feel the need to make snide remarks. All I do is just blankly stare in silence. During those moments, thinking that I must look like a nice young miss to everyone else, I don't worry about the gawking, I just want to bask in their attention, and I feel really and truly mellow.

But actually glasses are the worst. Any sense of your face disappears when you put them on. Glasses obstruct whatever emotions that might appear on your face—passion, grace, fury, weakness, innocence, sorrow. And it's curious how it becomes impossible to try to communicate with your eyes.

Glasses are like a ghost.

The reason I hate glasses so much is because I think the beauty of your eyes is the best thing about people. Even if they can't see your nose or if your mouth is hidden, I think that all you need are eyes—the kind of eyes that will inspire others, when they are looking into them, to live more beautifully. My eyes are just big saucers, nothing more to them. When I look closely at them in the mirror, it's disappointing. Even my mother says I have unremarkable eyes. You might say that there is no light in them. They're like lumps of charcoal—it's that unfortunate. See what I mean? It's dreadful. When I see them in the mirror—every time—I think to myself, I wish I had nice eyes that sparkled softly. Eyes like a deep blue lake, or eyes that look as if they reflect the big sky that you might look up at while lying in a lush green meadow, with clouds floating by every so often. You might even see the shadow of birds in them. I hope I meet lots of people with lovely eyes.

Today is May, I reminded myself, and my mood seemed to lighten a bit. In fact, I felt happy. Soon it would be summer. As I went out into the garden I noticed strawberry flowers. The reality of Father's death felt strange to me.

That he had died—passed away—seemed impossible to understand. I couldn't wrap my head around it. I missed my older sister, or people I used to be friends with, or people I hadn't seen in a long time. I cannot stand mornings because it seems I am always bleakly reminded of long-gone times, and people I used to know, and their presences feel eerily close, like the scent of pickled radish that you just can't get rid of.

The two dogs Jappy and Poo (we call him Poo because he is such a poor little thing) came running over. I had them both sit in front of me, but I only petted Jappy. Jappy's pale fur gleamed. Poo was dirty. As I was petting Jappy, I was perfectly aware of Poo next to him, who looked like he was about to start whining. I was also aware that Poo was crippled. I hate how sad Poo is. I can't stand how poor and pathetic he is, and because of that I am cruel to him. Poo looks like a stray dog, so there is no telling when he might get nabbed and killed. With his leg like that, he would be too slow to run away. Hurry, Poo, go on up into the mountains! No one's going to take care of you, so you may as well die. I'm the kind of girl who will say or do unspeakable things, not just to Poo, but to anyone. I annoy and provoke people. I really am a horrid girl. Sitting down on the veranda while I rubbed Jappy's head, I gazed at the eye-drenching green of the leaves and had a pathetic urge to sit directly on the ground.

I felt like trying to cry. I held my breath for a good while, in order to make my eyes bloodshot, and I thought I might be able to squeeze out a tear, but it was no good. Maybe I've turned into an impassive girl.

I gave up and started cleaning the house. While I cleaned, I happened to be singing a song from the movie, "Tojin Okichi." I felt like I ought to look around. How amusing that I, who normally was wild about Mozart and Bach, would unconsciously break out into a song from "Tojin Okichi." If I go on saying "Alley-oop" when I hoist the bedding or singing "Tojin Okichi" as I'm cleaning, there'll be no hope left for me. At this rate, I fear what crude things I might utter in my sleep. Still, there was something odd about it, and I rested the broom in my hand and smiled to myself.

I changed into the underclothes I had finished sewing yesterday. I had embroidered little white roses on the bodice. You couldn't see this embroidery when I put on the rest of my clothes. No one knew it was there. How brilliant.

Mother, who was very busy arranging someone's marriage, had gone out early this morning. Ever since I was little, Mother had devoted herself to

other people, so I was used to it by now, but it really was amazing how she was constantly in motion. She impressed me. Father had done nothing but study, so it fell to Mother to take up his part. Father was far removed from things like social interactions, but Mother really knew how to surround herself with lovely people. The two of them seemed an unlikely pairing, but there had been a mutual respect between them. People must have often said about them, What a handsome and untroubled couple, without any unattractive qualities. Oh, I'm so cheeky.

While the miso soup was warming up, I sat in the doorway of the kitchen and stared idly at the copse of trees out front. At that moment, I had the odd sensation that I had been staring like this for a very long time, and would be staring from now on, just like this, sitting here in the doorway to the kitchen, in the same pose, thinking the same thing, looking at the trees out front. It felt as if the past, the present, and the future had collapsed into one single instant. Such things happen to me from time to time. I'd be sitting there, talking to someone. My gaze would wander to a corner of the table and affix itself there, unmoving. Only my mouth would move. At times like these, a strange hallucination always occurs. I would feel absolutely certain that, at some point before, under these very conditions, I've had the same conversation while, in fact, staring at the corner of the table and that what was happening now would continue to go on indefinitely, in exactly the same manner. Whenever I walk along a country path, no matter how remote it is, I always feel that I have undoubtedly been on the same path before. Whenever I walk along and pluck soybean leaves at the path's edge, I always think that I have surely been on this same path and plucked these leaves before. And I believe that, from then on, over and over again, I will walk along this path, and pull soybean leaves from the exact same spots. Again, these kinds of things happen to me. Sometimes, I'd be soaking in the bath and suddenly glimpse my hand. Then, I would become convinced that however many years from now, while soaking in the bath, I will be transported to this moment when a random glance at my hand turned into a stare, and I will remember how it made me feel. These thoughts always make me rather gloomy. And once when I was putting rice into an ohitsu serving bowl, I was struck by—well, it would be an exaggeration to call it inspiration but I felt something charging within my body—zipping through me like, how shall I say, I would almost call it a philosophical glimpse—and I gave myself over to it, then my head and my

chest became transparent all the way through as a sense of my own existence floated down and settled over me and, silently, without making a sound, as pliant as tokoroten before you make them into noodles, I felt at the mercy of these waves, a light and beautiful feeling that I would be able to live on this way. Now, this wasn't a philosophical commotion. But it was frightening, rather, this premonition of living like a kleptomaniac cat, stealthily and quietly, and couldn't lead to any good. To go on like that for any length of time, it seems, you would end up like you're possessed. Like Jesus Christ. But the idea of a female Jesus Christ seems appalling.

Ultimately though—since I'm just idle most of the time, and I really don't have any troubles to worry about—I wonder if I am just desensitized to the hundreds if not thousands of things I see and hear everyday, and in my bewilderment, those things end up assailing me like floating ghosts, one after another.

I sat down to eat breakfast by myself in the dining room. I had cucumbers for the first time this year. Summer seems to come from a cucumber's greenness. The green of a May cucumber has a sadness like an empty heart, an aching, ticklish sadness. When I'm eating alone in the dining room, I get this wild urge to travel. I want to get on a train. I opened the newspaper. There was a photo of that actor Jushiro Konoe. I wondered if he was a good guy. I decided I didn't like his face. Something about his forehead. My favorite things in the newspaper are the advertisements for books. It must cost one or two hundred yen for each character on each line, so whoever writes them are all trying their best. Each character, each phrase must generate the most possible impact, so these wonderfully wrought sentences groan with pain. Such expensive words must be pretty rare in the world. There's something I like about this. It's thrilling.

I finished eating, locked up the house, and headed for school. All right, there's no rain, I thought to myself, but anyway I wanted to walk along with the nice umbrella that Mother gave to me yesterday, so I took it with me. Mother used this parasol long ago, when she first got married. I felt quite proud for finding this interesting umbrella. When I carried this one, it made me feel like strolling through the streets of Paris. I thought that a dreamy antique parasol like this would go into style when this war ends. It would look great with a bonnet-style hat. Wearing a long pink-hemmed kimono with a wide open collar, with black lace gloves and a beautiful violet tucked into that large, wide-brimmed hat. And when everything was lush and green

I'd go to lunch in a Parisian restaurant. Resting my cheek lightly in my hand, I'd wistfully gaze at the passersby outside and then, someone would gently tap me on the shoulder. Suddenly there would be music, the rose waltz. Oh, how amusing. In reality, it was just an odd, tattered umbrella with a spindly handle. I really am miserable and pathetic. Like the little match girl. I decided to just do a little weeding and be off.

On my way, as I passed the gate to our house, I plucked some of the weeds out front as a bit of volunteer service to Mother. Maybe something good would happen today. Even though the weeds were all the same, it seemed like certain of them begged to be pulled while others would be quietly left behind. The likable weeds and the not likable weeds looked exactly the same but were somehow clearly divided into those that seemed innocuous and those that seemed horrible. It didn't stand to reason. What a girl likes and what she hates seems rather arbitrary to me. After ten minutes of volunteer weeding, I hurried to the depot. Whenever I go by the field road, it makes me feel like painting a picture. Along the way, I walked the path through the shrine's woods. This was a shortcut that I had discovered all on my own. Walking on the path in the woods, I happened to look down and saw short patches of barley growing here and there. Seeing this new green barley, I could tell that the soldiers were here this year as well. Like last year, there had been many soldiers and horses that came and stayed in these woods by the shrine. A while later, I had come through here and saw the barley burgeoning, like it was today. But that barley hadn't grown any taller. Again this year, the grains had spilled out of the buckets for the soldiers' horses and taken seed, and here in these dark woods that saw hardly any sunlight, the thin reeds, sadly, wouldn't grow any higher, they'd likely just wither away.

I emerged from the path through the shrine's woods and, close by the station, found myself on the road with four or five laborers. As usual, these guys spat out some nasty and unmentionable phrases in my direction. I hesitated, unsure of what to do. I wanted to pass them, but to do so, I'd have to thread my way amongst them in order to slip by them. That was scary. On the other hand, if I just stood there without saying anything, and waited a good while to let the laborers get far enough ahead of me, that would take much more guts. It would be rude, and they might get angry. My body grew hot, I felt like I was about to cry. I was ashamed to be on the verge of tears, so I turned and laughed in the direction of the guys. Then, slowly, I started

walking after them. That might have been the end of it but, even after I was on the train, my chagrin had not dissipated. I wished I would hurry up and grow stronger and purer so that such a trifling matter would no longer afflict me.

There was an empty seat right by the train door, so I set my things down on it and smoothed the pleats on my skirt a little, but just as I was about to sit down, a man wearing glasses moved my stuff and sat down himself.

When I said, "Uh, that was my seat," the man forced a smile and then, unconcerned, began reading his newspaper. When I thought about it, though, which of us was the brazen one? Probably me.

Grudgingly, I put my parasol and the rest of my things up on the rack and hung onto a strap. I started to read a magazine, like I always do, but as I riffled through the pages with one hand, I had a strange thought.

Given my lack of experience, if my books were taken away from me, I would be utterly devastated. That's how much I depend on what's written in books. I'll read one book and be completely wild about it—I'll trust it, I'll assimilate it, I'll sympathize with it, I'll try to make it a part of my life. Then, I'll read another book and, instantly, I'll switch over to that one. The sly ability to steal someone else's experience and recreate it as if it were my own is the only real talent I possess. Really, though, my guile is so bogus as to be offensive. If I were to experience failure upon failure day after day—nothing but total embarrassment—then perhaps I'd develop some semblance of dignity as a result. But no, I would somehow illogically twist even such failures, gloss over them smoothly, so that it would seem like they had a perfectly good theory behind them. And I would have no qualms about putting on a desperate show to do so.

(I'm sure I've even read these same words before in some book.)

Really, I don't know which is the true me. What ever will I do when there aren't any more books to read, or when I can't find another role model to imitate? Probably just wither away, helpless and sniveling profusely. Anyhow, these aimless thoughts I have on the train every day don't do me much good. The unpleasant warmth I still felt in my body was unbearable. I felt I had to do something, somehow, but would I be able to fully grasp what that was? My self-criticisms seem basically pointless to me. I would start to judge, and when I'd get to my negative or weak traits, I'd immediately begin to indulge or wallow in self-pity, and then decide it's no

good, why not just leave well enough alone, so I've given up on criticism. It would be best if I just didn't think of anything at all.

In this very magazine, there was the headline, "Young Women's Shortcomings," with things various people had written. As I read it, I got the feeling that they were talking about me and I started to feel self-conscious. So the authors, some of them—well, the ones I normally thought were stupid, not surprisingly, said things that sounded pretty stupid, and when I looked at their photos, the ones who looked cool had cool things to say—they were so funny that at times I chuckled out loud as I read. The religious ones were quick to bring up faith, the educators were all about moral obligation, and the politicians trotted out Chinese poetry. The writers were smug, using fancy words. They sounded stuck up.

But what all of them were writing about were merely certainties. Impersonal things, things lacking depth. They were far removed from anything like real hopes or ambitions. Basically, uninspired things. They were criticisms, yes, but not actually things that had any positive bearing on my life. There was no introspection. No real self-awareness, self-regard, or self-respect. It may require courage to say what they said, but were they really able to take responsibility for the consequences? They may adapt their lifestyle to their environment, and may be capable of processing this but there's no true attachment to the self or to that particular lifestyle. There's no real sense of humility. A scarcity of creativity. Only mimicry. Any sense of innate "love" was simply lacking. They may put on airs but they had no dignity. Instead, all they did was write. It was really quite startling as I read. There was no denying it.

Yet everything in the article seemed like these people had just tried to write it down—it seemed different than the way they usually felt, optimistic somehow. They used lots of phrases like "the true meaning of" or "essentially," but they didn't really grapple with the meaning of "true" love or "real" self-awareness. These people probably knew all about it. But if that were so, they might have been more specific—just a few words, something simple like, go to the left or go to the right—if they could use their authority to show the way, it would be tremendously appreciated. Since we had already lost course on how to express love, if someone, instead of telling us not to do this or that, were to instruct us convincingly about what we ought to do, all of us would gladly pay heed. Doesn't anyone have any self-confidence? I doubted that the people who had published their

opinions here always felt the same way, in every situation. They scolded us for not having any real hopes or real ambitions, but if we were to pursue our true ideals, would these people watch and guide us along the way?

We have a vague notion of the best place we should go, or the beautiful places we should like to see, or the kinds of places that would make us grow as a person. We yearn for a good life. We have real hopes and ambitions. We feel impatient for an unshakable faith that we can rely on. But it would require considerable effort to express such things in our typical life as a girl. Then there's also the way that our mothers and fathers think, and our brothers and sisters too. (I may say that they're too old-fashioned and stuffy, but really I don't feel any contempt for my mentors in life, or my elders, or married people. On the contrary, they must know about a million times more than I do.) I mean, the members of our family are part of every aspect of our life. We have acquaintances too. And friends. Then there's also the "world" that constantly sweeps us along with great force. When we see and hear and think about all of this, we hardly have any time to fuss about being true to our own character. The smartest thing would just be to go quietly along the same way with all the other regular people, without calling attention to ourself. Extending discipline for the minority to everyone else at the same time seems particularly cruel. As I grow older, I have begun to understand more and more how ethics taught in school and public mores are two different things. Those who insist on keeping ethics in school look like fools. People think they're eccentric. They'll never succeed, they'll always be penniless. I wonder if there are people who don't lie. If there are, they must always be losers. Among my relatives, there is one person who behaves with propriety, who has a strong faith and pursues his ideals, who really lives in a true sense, although everyone else in the family speaks poorly of him. They treat him like an idiot. Me, I can't bring myself to go against mother and everyone else for the sake of my ideals, while knowing all along that I would be beaten down, defeated. It scares me. When I was little, when my feelings about something were completely different from the others, I always used to ask Mother, "Why is that?" At those times, Mother would dismiss me with a word and then be angry. Bad girl! What's wrong with you? she'd say sadly. Sometimes I'd ask Father too. He would just smile and say nothing. Then later I'd hear him tell Mother, "That child stands apart." Then as I gradually got older, I grew timid. Now, even when I make an outfit for myself, I wonder what other people will

think. The truth is that I secretly love what seems to be my own individuality, and I hope I always will, but fully embodying it is another matter. I always want everyone to think I am a good girl. Whenever I am around a lot of people, it is amazing how obsequious I can be. I fib and chatter away, saying things I don't want to or mean in any way. I feel like it is to my advantage to do so. I hate it. I hope for a revolution in ethics and morals. Then, my obsequiousness and this need to plod through life according to others' expectations would simply dissolve.

Oh, there's a seat over there. I hurriedly grabbed my parasol and things from the rack and quickly squeezed myself into the spot. To my right was a junior high school student, to my left was a lady with a child on her back and wearing a nenneko that covered them both. The lady had on too much makeup for someone her age, and her hair was coiled in a popular style. She had a pretty face but there were dark wrinkles on her neck and her coarseness made me want to hit her in disgust. It's amazing how much your thoughts vary, depending on whether you're standing or seated. When I'm sitting down, my mind fills with fickle and apathetic thoughts. Across from me four or five salarymen who all looked about the same age were just sitting there. They must have been around 30. I didn't like any of them. Their eyes were empty and dull. They had no vigor. But now, if I so much as grinned at them, I could very well be dragged off by one of these men, falling into the chasm of compulsory marriage. A mere smile can determine a woman's fate. It is frightening. Fascinatingly so. I have to be careful. My thoughts were really rather strange this morning. For some reason, the face of the gardener who had come to tend our yard two or three days ago kept flickering in my mind. You couldn't mistake him for anything else other than a gardener, but something about his face seemed quite unusual to me. To put it dramatically, he looked like an intellectual or a visionary. His skin just had a dusky firmness to it. He had nice eyes, and an imposing brow. He definitely had a pug nose, but it matched his dark complexion and made him appear strong-willed. The shape of his lips was also quite nice. His ears were a little dirty. When you looked at his hands, of course, he reverted to being a gardener, but with his fedora worn low on his head and shading his face, it seemed a shame that he should end up a gardener. I asked Mother three or four times, I wonder if he has always been a gardener, until finally she scolded me. The furoshiki that my things were wrapped up in today was the one that Mother gave me on the very first day that gardener came to our

house. We were doing a thorough house cleaning that day, so the kitchen repairman was there, as well as the tatami man, and Mother was tidying everything in the wardrobe, so that's when she found this furoshiki and gave it to me. It's very beautiful and feminine. It's so pretty, it's a shame to tie it up. Sitting here now, with it balanced on my knees, I kept stealing glances at it. I stroked it. I wanted everyone on the train to notice it, but nobody did. If someone would simply take a look at my pretty furoshiki, I would be willing to go home with him and marry into his family. Whenever I run up against what's called "instinct," I feel like I want to cry. As I begin to realize from various experiences in my life just how enormous our instincts are and how powerless we are against the force that drives us, sometimes I think I might lose my mind. I become distracted, wondering what I should to do. There is no way to resist or accept the force; it simply feels as if some huge thing has blanketed me whole, from the top of my head, so that it can now drag me around freely. There is a certain satisfaction in being dragged around, as well as a separate sad feeling as I watch it happen. Why is it that we cannot be happy with ourself or love only ourself throughout our life? It is pathetic to watch whatever emotions or sense of reason I have acquired up to that point be devoured by instinct. Whenever I let the slightest thing make me forget myself, I can't help but be disappointed. The clear confirmation that that self—me, that is—is also ruled by instinct makes me think I could cry. It makes me want to call out for Mother and Father. But even more pathetic is that—to my surprise—the truth could be found in aspects of myself that I don't like.

We were already at Ochanomizu. When I stepped off onto the platform, somehow I felt completely unfazed. I tried quickly to recall what had just happened, but I couldn't for the life of me. Anxiously I tried to think of what came next, but there was nothing. My mind was empty. There are times, like this, when something is quite affecting—when you think I would feel awkward or ashamed, but as soon as it passed, it would be like nothing had happened. The present moment is interesting to me. Now, now, now—even while you try to pin down an instant, it flies off into the distance, and a new "now" arrives. Whatsit anyway? I thought to myself as I plodded up the stairs to the bridge. Ridiculous. Maybe I am a little too happy.

My teacher Miss Kosugi was beautiful this morning. As beautiful as my furoshiki. Miss Kosugi looked lovely in blue, and she wore a striking crimson carnation on her breast. But I would like this teacher a whole lot

more if she weren't so "composed." She's a bit too poised—there's something unnatural about her. It must be exhausting to be her. And she seems somewhat obscure—there are many things I don't know about her character. Like, she seems gloomy but she's trying too hard to be cheerful. Nevertheless, she is an attractive woman. It seems a shame for her just to be a schoolteacher. Her class isn't as popular as it used to be but I—and I alone—still find her as charming as ever. She's like a young miss who lives in an old castle on the shore of a mountain lake. Ugh, I've praised her too much. I wonder why Miss Kosugi's lectures are always so stiff. Is she a fool? It makes me sad. She went on and on, explaining to us about patriotism, but wasn't that pretty obvious? I mean, everyone loves the place where they were born. I felt bored. Resting my chin on my desk, I gazed idly out the window. The clouds were beautiful, maybe because it was so windy. There were four roses blooming in a corner of the yard. One was yellow, two were white, and one was pink. I sat there agape, looking at the flowers, and thought to myself, There are really good things about human beings. I mean, it's humans who discovered the beauty of flowers, and humans who admire them.

At lunchtime, people began telling ghost stories. Everyone screamed when Yasubei told hers about "The Locked Door," one of the "Seven Wonders of Ichiko," the First Higher School of Tokyo. It was interesting, not so much spooky as psychological. But because of all the fuss, even though I had just eaten, I was hungry again. I ran over to the anpan lady and got a caramel bun. Then once again, I fell in with all the others and their scary tales for a while. It seemed like every last one of them was just wild about ghost stories and all. I guess it's one form of excitement. And then, it wasn't a ghost story, but the talk about Fusanosuke Kuhara was very amusing indeed.

In the afternoon, for art class, we all went out into the schoolyard to practice sketching. For some reason, Mr. Ito always puts me on the spot. Like today, he made me be the model for his drawing. The old umbrella that I brought with me today received a welcome reaction from everyone—it made quite a stir in class—so much so that even Mr. Ito heard about it, so he told me to take it and stand over by the roses in the corner of the schoolyard. He said that his drawing of me would appear in the next exhibition. All I had to do was be his model for 30 minutes. I was glad to be helpful, even in the least. But it was very tiring to stand there, facing Mr.

Ito. The conversation was a bit too persistent and boring, maybe because he was paying me so much attention—even while he was sketching me, the only thing he asked me about was me. I found it troublesome and annoying to answer him. He seems like an ambiguous person. He has an odd laugh, and he's shy, even though he's a teacher. His utter diffidence makes me want to throw up. I could barely stand it when he said, "You remind me of my younger sister who died." I suppose he is a nice enough person, but his gestures are too much.

By gestures, I should say that I myself use quite a lot of them. What's more, I employ them slyly to my advantage. I can be so pretentious that it's hard to deal with sometimes. "I overcompensate, so that I become a monstrous little liar ruled by the conventions of poise," I might say, but then, this too is just another pose, so it's hopeless. As I stood there quietly modeling for Mr. Ito, I prayed intently, "Let me be natural, let me be genuine." I thought I would even give up reading books. I would scorn the pointless, haughty posturing, scorn its abstracted way of living. There I go again—pondering the purposelessness of my day-to-day life, wishing I had more ambition, and lamenting all the contradictions in myself—when I know it's just sentimental nonsense. All I'm doing is indulging myself, trying to console myself. I give myself too much credit—Mr. Ito's drawing of someone with a heart as impure as mine will surely be rejected. Why would that be beautiful? It's a terrible thing to say, but I guess it ends up making Mr. Ito look pretty stupid. He doesn't even know about the embroidered roses on my underclothes.

Standing there silently, trying to keep still, I had a sudden and intense desire for money. All I needed was ten yen. The book I really wanted to read was Madame Curie. Then, unexpectedly, I wished for Mother to have a long life. Being Mr. Ito's model was strangely difficult. It was exhausting.

After school, the temple priest's daughter Kinko and I snuck over to Hollywood and got our hair done. I was disappointed when I saw the finished product, since it wasn't what I had asked for. No matter how you looked at it, I didn't look cute at all. I felt wretched. Totally dejected. I had slipped over here just to have my hair done, and now to feel like such a scruffy hen made me deeply contrite. I felt scornful of myself for our having come here. Kinko, on the other hand, was gleeful.

"I wonder if I should go to my omiai meetings like this," she suggested brusquely, apparently under the illusion that before long her own marriage

was sure to be arranged.

She went on, "What color flower should I wear with this hairstyle?" And then, "When I wear a kimono, which style of obi is best?" she asked in all seriousness.

Kinko really is an adorable fool.

When I asked her sweetly, "With whom is your omiai?" she answered straightforwardly, "Every man to his trade, or so they say." A little surprised, I asked, What does that mean? I was even more surprised when she replied, It's best for a temple daughter to become a temple bride. I'll never have to worry about where my next meal comes from. Kinko seems to lack any trace of a personality and, as a result, her femininity is at full tilt. I only know her because we sit next to each other at school, and I don't consider us particularly close, but Kinko tells everyone that I am her best friend. She's a lovely girl. She sends me letters every other day and is generally very nice to me, which I appreciate, but today she was a little too jolly which, not surprisingly, had put me off. I said goodbye to Kinko and got on the bus. For some reason, I felt kind of glum. There was a disgusting woman on the bus. The collar of her kimono was soiled, and her unkempt red hair was held up with a comb. Her hands and feet were dirty. And she wore a sullen look on her darkly ruddy androgynous face. Ugh, she made me sick. The woman had a large belly. From time to time, she smiled to herself. The hen. There was really no difference between this woman and me, having snuck off to Hollywood to have my hair done.

I was reminded of the lady next to me on the train this morning with the heavy makeup. Ugh, so vile. Women are disgusting. Being female, I am all too familiar with the impurity found in women, it sets my teeth on edge with repulsion. It's as if that unbearable raw stench that clings to you after playing with goldfish has spread all over your body, and you wash and wash but you can't get rid of it. Day after day, it's like this, until you realize that the she-odor has begun to emanate from your own body as well. I wish I could die like this, as a girl. Suddenly, I think I want to be sick. If I contracted a serious enough illness, and I were to sweat so profusely that I wasted away, perhaps then I would be cleansed and pure. In this lifetime, it is really impossible to escape? I am beginning to understand the significance of a steadfast religion.

I felt a little better after I got off the bus. Maybe I should not take public transportation. I can't stand how unpleasantly warm the air is. Nature is

good. Walking along with my feet on the ground, I felt better about myself. I really am a bit of a scatterbrain. I'm happy-go-lucky. I sang out softly, Let's go home, let's go home, what do you see on your way home? Look at the onion field, let's go home, they're crying 'go home' so let's go home. It annoyed me that I could act like such a carefree child, and it made me want to lash out at the weeds, who knew nothing but to grow taller. I wanted to try to be a good girl.

The country road that I take home everyday has become so familiar to me that I no longer notice how quiet it is. There's nothing but trees, road, and fields—that's all. I thought today I will try to pretend that I am from somewhere else, someone who has never been to this country town before. I'll be, hmm... the daughter of a wooden clog maker with a shop near Kanda, who's never set foot outside of the city. So then, what did this countryside look like? This was a brilliant idea. A sad, pathetic idea. I put on a serious expression and made a point of looking around. As I walked down the road lined with small trees, I gazed up at the branches with their new green leaves and let out a slight cry of delight. As I crossed over the earthen bridge, I stopped and peered down at my reflection in the water and barked, imitating a dog. Then I looked out at the fields, squinting my eyes with an air of enchantment, sighing as I murmured, Isn't this nice? I took another break at the shrine. It was dark in the shrine's woods so I hastily straightened up and hurried through, muttering timidly with a slight shrug of my shoulders. I acted surprised by how bright it was when I came out of the woods, and while I was engrossed in trying to see everything afresh as I walked along the country road, I was somehow overcome with a terrible sadness. At last I flopped down in a meadow by the side of the road. Sitting atop the grass, the exhilaration that I had felt up until that very instant disappeared with a thud and was replaced with a gripping earnestness. Calmly, I gave some thought to how I'd been lately. What was wrong with me these days? Why was I so anxious? I was always apprehensive about something. Just the other day, someone even mentioned to me, "Hey, you're getting to be so mundane."

It's probably true. There definitely is something wrong with me. I have become petty. I am no good at all. I am pathetic. Out of the blue I nearly cried out at the top of my lungs. Pshaw... as if a loud holler was going to cover my gutlessness. I have to do something more. Maybe I am in love. I lay back on the green meadow.

"Father," I tried calling out. Father. Father, the sunset afterglow is beautiful. And the evening haze is pink. See how the rays from the setting sun melt and blur into the haze, which is why it takes on such a soft pink glow. The pink haze drifts and sways amongst the grove of trees, trailing above the road and caressing the meadow, before gently enveloping my body. It infuses every last strand of my hair with its soft pink light and then lightly embraces me. But this sky is even more beautiful. For the first time in my life, I want to bow my head to the heavens. Now I believe in G-d. The color of this sky, what would you call it? Rose? Flame? Iridescent? The color of angel's wings? Or a huge temple? No, it is none of these things. It is much more sublime.

"I want to love everyone," I thought, almost tearfully. If you stare at the sky, it changes little by little. Gradually it turns bluish. Then, with nothing more than a sigh, I felt the urge to be naked. I had never seen anything as beautiful as the translucent leaves and grass. Gently, I reached out to touch the grass.

I want to live beautifully.

When I arrived home, Mother was already there with houseguests. Not surprisingly, she was laughing cheerily at something. When it was just the two of us, no matter how hard she laughed, Mother never made a sound. On the contrary, when she entertained guests her face didn't smile at all, instead high-pitched laughter rang out. I greeted them, quickly went around to the back and washed my hands at the well, then I took off my socks. As I was washing my feet, the fishmonger showed up, calling out, Here you go! One large fish, thanks for your business! He set the fish on the well. I didn't know what kind of fish it was but something about its fine scales made me think it came from the northern sea. I put the fish on a plate and washed my hands again, and I caught a scent of summer in Hokkaido. It reminded me of the time I went to visit my older sister in Hokkaido during summer vacation two years ago. Perhaps because her home in Tomakomai was near the shore, you could always catch the scent of fish. I could clearly picture Sis, alone in that big empty kitchen at eveningtime, her white womanly hands deftly preparing fish for dinner. I remembered how, for some reason, I had wanted to be coddled by my sister, I couldn't help but crave her attention, but she had already given birth to little Toshi, and Sis was no longer my own. The fact that I couldn't simply fling my arms around her narrow shoulders had dawned on me like a chill draft. I stood in a corner of

that dim kitchen with a feeling of intense loneliness and, stunned, kept my gaze fixed on her pale, graceful fingertips as they worked. I yearned for everything long gone. It was so curious, the way I felt about my family. With anyone else, if we were far apart, they would eventually grow fainter in my mind until I forgot about them, but with family, their memory seemed only to grow fonder and all I remembered were the beautiful things about them.

The oleaster berries by the well had barely started to turn red. They would probably be ready to eat in another two weeks. It was funny last year. One evening I had come out by myself to pick and eat the berries, and Jappy had watched me silently until I felt bad for him and gave him a berry. He ate it right up, so I gave him two more, which he gobbled too. Rather amused, I shook the tree, and as the berries trickled down, Jappy eagerly devoured them. Stupid dog. I had never seen a dog who ate oleander berries before. I reached out, picking more berries and eating them myself. Jappy was eating them off the ground. It was funny. Thinking about this made me miss Jappy, so I called out his name.

Jappy strutted over from the direction of the front door. I was suddenly seized with a furious surge of love for Jappy, and as I caught hold of his tail roughly, he gently bit my hand. I felt like bursting into tears, and I swatted him on the head. Unperturbed, he drank water loudly from the well.

When I went into the house, the lights were already on. It was quiet. Father was gone. I felt his absence within the house like a gaping void that made me shiver with agony. I changed into Japanese clothes, giving a little kiss to the roses on my discarded underthings, and when a burst of laughter rose from the parlor as I sat down in front of the dressing mirror, I suddenly felt angry for some reason. Everything was fine when it was just the two of us, Mother and me, but whenever anyone else was around, she seemed strangely distant—cold and formal—and those were the times when I missed Father the most, when I felt the saddest.

Peering at my face in the mirror, I looked surprisingly lively. My face was like that of a stranger. An animated face, liberated from my own sadness and pain and seemingly disconnected from such feelings. Although I wasn't wearing any rouge today, my cheeks were attractively rosy, and my lips glowed prettily. I took off my glasses and smiled softly. My eyes looked so nice. They were so pale and clear. I wondered if staring at the

beautiful evening sky for so long had made my eyes look like this. Lucky me.

I went into the kitchen a little jauntily and then, while I was washing the rice, sadness washed back over me. I missed the house where we used to live in Koganei. I missed it with a searing pain. Both Father and Sis had been in that lovely home. And Mother had been young there. When I would come home from school, Mother and Sis would be chatting amusingly in the kitchen or in the living room. I'd be given a snack, and they'd both dote on me for a little while, then I'd pick a quarrel with my sister and be scolded, without fail, and I'd rush off outside to ride my bike as far away as I could. In the evening I'd return and we'd have a pleasant dinner. I really did enjoy it. There had been no need to reflect upon myself or be anxious about my impurity—all I had to do was be coddled. What a tremendous privilege I had enjoyed. And I hadn't even cared. There had been nothing to worry about, or to be sad or bitter about. Father had been a splendid and wonderful father. Sis was kind, I had constantly hung about her. But then, gradually as I grew up, first I began to disgust myself, and before I knew it that privilege of mine had disappeared and, stripped bare, I was absolutely awful. I hadn't the least desire to play up to anyone, I was always brooding over something, and I faced constant hardship. Sis was married off, and Father was no longer here. Mother and I were left all alone. Mother must have been terribly lonely too. She once said to me, "From now on, the joy in life is gone. Forgive me for saying, but when I look at you, the truth is, I don't feel much pleasure. Without your father, perhaps it's best if there is no happiness." She said that when the mosquitoes come out she suddenly thinks of Father, when she does the unsewing she thinks of Father, when she trims her nails she also thinks of Father, and especially when the tea is delicious she thinks of Father. No matter how much I sympathize with how Mother felt, or how much companionship I offer her, I will never compare with Father. Marital love is the strongest love in the world, stronger than familial love, and a precious thing it is. Such impertinent thoughts, even when I was alone, made my face grow hot, and I smoothed my hair with a wet hand. Swishing the rice as I washed it, Mother seemed very dear and pitiable to me—I ought to cherish her with all of my heart. I would take this silly wave out of my hair immediately and grow my hair much longer. Mother has never cared for short hair on me, so if I grow it out and then show her how it looks done up properly, I bet she'll be pleased. But to do

something like that out of sympathy for Mother seems absurd. Horrible, really. When I think about it, my irritability these days is definitely related to Mother. I want to be a good daughter whose feelings are in perfect sync with Mother's, and just because of that, I go to these absurd lengths to please her. The best thing would be if Mother could just intuit how I felt, without my saying anything, and she could rest easy. No matter how selfish I am, I will never do anything to make myself a laughingstock—even in my pain and loneliness I will still protect what is important. Since I love Mother and this house so very dearly, she should have absolute confidence in me, and just be carefree and relaxed. I will make sure to do a good job. I will keep my nose to the grindstone. It would be my greatest pleasure—it's the way I should be living anyway. But nevertheless, Mother still treated me like a child, without the slightest faith in me. Mother loved it when I said childish things, she acted so thrilled the other day when I made a show of pulling out the ukulele, plunking away on it and being silly for her. "Oh, is it raining? Are those raindrops I hear?" she feigned, teasing me, and she probably thought I was actually being serious about some silly ukulele. I felt so wretched I wanted to cry. Mother, I'm an adult now. I know all about the world now. Don't worry, you can talk to me about anything. If you were to confide everything to me, even things like our household budget, telling me exactly how it is, then I certainly wouldn't pester you to buy me shoes. I'll be a steady and frugal daughter. Really and truly. In spite of all that. "Oh, In Spite of All That"... wasn't that the name of a song, I chuckled to myself. At some point I realized I was standing there like an idiot, both hands idly thrust into the cooking pot, my thoughts ranging from one thing to another.

Oh, I almost forgot. I had better offer the guests something for supper. What should I do with that big fish? In the meantime, I should cut it into three pieces and marinate them in miso paste. That will make it taste great. With cooking, you just have to trust your intuition. There was a bit of cucumber left, so I put that out and doused it with sanbaizu sauce. Then—my specialty—egg omelet. Then one more dish. Yes, that's it. I'll cook "rococo." This is something that I have invented. Various and sundry items found in the kitchen are mingled on each plate—ham and omelet, parsley, cabbage, spinach—beautifully and skillfully arranged, economical and trouble-free, if perhaps not the least bit delicious. But it presents a surprisingly lively and gorgeous table, and manages to appear as a quite

sumptuous meal. There was the green grass of the parsley beneath the omelet, then beside it the coral reef of the pink ham poked its head out, and the golden cabbage leaves were spread out on the plate like petals on a tree peony or like a fan of feathers, with the lush spinach a pasture or a lake, perhaps. Serve two or three plates like this, and guests will be unexpectedly reminded of King Louis. Of course that won't happen, but anyway, since I can't offer much in the way of cooking, the least I can do is try to fool guests with something beautiful that bedazzles them with its outward appearance. With cooking, it's all about the way it looks. That's usually enough to fool anyone. But cooking rococo requires a particular artistic inclination. You must have an uncommonly keen sense of color. Or at least my level of delicacy. When I looked up the word "rococo" in the dictionary the other day and saw that it was defined as a decorative style that was elaborate yet devoid of substance, I had to laugh. It was an apt description. Heaven forbid if beauty were to have substance. Genuine beauty is always meaningless, without virtue. It goes without saying. Which is why I love rococo.

As always happens, while I was busy preparing the meal and adding things here and there, I was overcome with an extreme emptiness. I felt depressed, and dead tired. I lapsed into overload from all my effort. Nothing mattered anymore. In the end, who cares?! I told myself desperately and, no longer concerned with taste or appearance, I flung things about in a messy clatter. Looking decidedly displeased, I brought the meal to the guests.

Today's visitors were particularly depressing, Mr. and Mrs. Imaida from Omori, and their son Yoshio who turned seven this year. Mr. Imaida was probably already near 40 but he had the pale complexion of a handsome man, which disgusted me. Why did he have to smoke those Shikishima cigarettes? For some reason, filters on cigarettes seem dirty to me. If you were going to smoke, then it had to be unfiltered. Smoking those Shikishimas throws a person's whole character into question. He looked up at the ceiling each time he exhaled smoke, saying, I see, I see, Is that right? He said he was teaching night school now. His wife was timid and petite, and unrefined. At every boring comment, she convulsed with laughter, her face almost pressed against the tatami floor. Was it really so funny? And was she under the impression that it was classy to prostrate herself while laughing so excessively? These people seemed like they were of the worst rank in today's world. The filthiest. Were they what they call petit

bourgeois? Or some kind of minor bureaucrat? And the child was a bit too saucy, there wasn't anything animated or genial about him. Despite my feelings, I forced myself to bow and smile and chat, saying how cute Yoshio was and giving him a pat on the head. Since I was the one lying outright and tricking them all, maybe the Imaidas were more pure and innocent than I was. Everyone ate my rococo cooking and praised my skill, and even though I felt like crying—either out of loneliness or exasperation—I tried to put on a happy face. Finally I joined them in the meal but Mrs. Imaida's persistent yet empty and ignorant flattery eventually stirred my bile.

All right, no more fibbing. I looked at her sternly and said, "This meal isn't delicious at all. There's nothing to it, really, it was a last-ditch measure on my part." My intention had been to state the obvious, but the Imaidas praised my use of "last-ditch measure," clapping their hands and laughing merrily. I thought about hurling my chopsticks and bowl with annoyance and howling at the top of my lungs. Instead I sat there and forced myself to grin at them, until Mother said, "This child is becoming more and more helpful."

Though Mother was perfectly aware of my sorrowful state, she chose to smile and spout such nonsense in order to entertain the Imaidas' sentiments. I had never seen Mother be so obsequious towards anyone, let alone this lot. She was not the same Mother when she was in the presence of guests. She was nothing more than a weak woman. Was this how subservient she had become since Father was gone? It made me so miserable, I was speechless. Please go home, please go home. My father was a fine man. Kind, and with a distinguished character. Now that Father is gone, if you're going to belittle us this way, please hurry up and go home. I dearly wanted to say this to the Imaidas. Yet I was just as weak, so I cut some ham for Yoshio and passed the pickled vegetables to Mrs. Imaida.

Once the meal was finished, I quickly retreated to the kitchen and started the washing-up. I could hardly wait to be alone. I didn't mean to be haughty, but I couldn't see any reason why I should ever be forced to make conversation with or sit and smile with those kinds of people, ever again. Those types certainly did not deserve my courtesy, or rather, my currying favor with them. I hated it. I couldn't take it anymore. I had tried as best as I could. Hadn't Mother seemed happy to see my patient and affable attitude today? Wasn't that enough? I didn't know whether it was better to maintain a fierce distinction between yourself and your acquaintances in society in

order to deal with and respond properly to things in a pleasant manner, or rather never to hide yourself, to remain true to yourself always, even if they say bad things about you. I envied those who were able to go through life simply in the midst of all the other weak, kind, and warm people like them. If it were possible to live my life without pain or hardship, then there would be no need to seek it out on my own. That would be best.

While surely there's something to be said for suppressing your own feelings for the sake of others, if everyday from now on I was forced to nod and smile at people like the Imaidas, I would probably go mad. I wouldn't make it in prison at all, the odd thought suddenly occurred to me. I couldn't work as a maid, much less be in prison. I couldn't be a wife, either. Well, being a wife is different. If it were duly resolved that I should devote my life to a particular person, then I could dedicate myself to the task, no matter how difficult, because I would have a purpose in life, I would have hope. Yes, I think I could even do a good job of it. It's not surprising. From morning to night, I'd make myself dizzy working like a busy bee. I'd do the laundry with vigor. Nothing upsets me more than a heap of dirty wash anyway. It makes me so restless you'd think I was manic or hysterical. I can't stop, no matter what. Then when the last article is washed and hung out to dry, finally I feel at peace.

Mr. Imaida was leaving. He must have had something to take care of, since Mother accompanied him as he left. The Mother who followed after him in acquiescence bothered me too, and this wasn't the only time Imaida had availed himself of Mother's assistance, but the Imaidas' impudence was so appalling, it made me want to give them a wallop. I saw them all off as far as the gate, and stood there alone in the dusk, staring at the road, and felt like trying to cry.

In the mailbox were two letters and the evening edition. One letter was addressed to Mother, a circular for a sale on summer items from Matsuzakaya Department Store. The other letter was for me, from my cousin Junji. He was being transferred to a regiment in Maebashi. Send my best to your mother, he wrote in his brief note. As an officer, you can't expect a particularly remarkable lifestyle, but I envy such a rigorously efficient and disciplined daily existence. It must be easier to relax when someone always told you who you are and what to do. For instance, right now, if I wanted to do nothing, then I could just do nothing. My circumstances are such that I could be as bad as I wanted, but then again, if

I felt like studying, I could study for as many hours on end as I liked. If someone were to give me a particular limit to abide by—to start here and use this much effort and finish there—you have no idea how much it would assuage my mind. I think I rather would appreciate a certain amount of constraint. I read in a book somewhere that soldiers in battle at the front had only one desire, to sleep soundly, and while on one hand I feel sorry for those soldiers, I am also terribly envious of them. To break free from this vexatious and awful never-ending cycle, this flood of outrageous thoughts, and to long for nothing more than simply to sleep—how clean, how pure, the mere thought of it is exhilarating. If someday I could live a military life, and be disciplined harshly, then I just might be capable of being a self-contained, beautiful daughter. There may be people, like Junji's younger brother Shin for instance, who are compliant even though they aren't in the military, but me, I'm such a horrible girl. Really I am. Shin is the same age as I am but I don't understand why he's such a good kid. Shin is my favorite relative—actually, he's my favorite person. Shin is blind. How dreadful it must be to lose your eyesight when you're young. I wonder what it's like for him, on a quiet night like this, alone in his room. The rest of us, when we're feeling forlorn, we can read a book or look out at the landscape and that might distract us a bit, but Shin can't do that. All he can do is sit there quietly. Shin studies twice as hard as anybody, and he's good at swimming and tennis too, but what is this kind of loneliness or pain like for him? Last night I was also thinking about Shin, and when I got into bed, I tried keeping my eyes closed for five minutes. Even just lying in bed with my eyes shut, five minutes felt like so long, I couldn't breathe. But morning, noon, and night, day after day, month after month, Shin never saw anything. I would have been happy if he ever whined or lost his temper or acted selfish, but he never did. I have never heard him complain or say anything bad about anyone. In fact, he always has an innocent look and a cheerful way of speaking, and that comes across all the more clearly to my mind.

My thoughts wandered while I swept the parlor and then prepared the bath. As the bathwater heated, I sat on a mandarin orange box and did my schoolwork by the flickering light of the burning coals. When I had finished it all, the bathwater still wasn't hot so I reread A Strange Tale from East of the River. I didn't find what's written in the story the least bit disgusting or dirty. But there were times when the author's pretensions stood out, which somehow reminded me how old-fashioned and unreliable he was. Maybe he

was just an old geezer. But foreign writers, no matter how old they are, they love their subjects more daringly and deeply and, what is more, without pretense. Though in Japan, was this book even considered good? I found the relatively truthful and quiet resignation that was at the heart of it refreshing. Of all this author's works, I liked this one, it seemed the most mature. I had the impression that he had a very strong sense of responsibility. His intense attachment to Japanese morals seemed to make much of his writing overly reactionary and strangely lurid. Excessively passionate characters have a tendency to behave poorly. The author contrived to wear the mask of a wicked fiend, which only served to weaken his stories. But this tale gained a resolute strength from its pathos. I liked it.

The bathwater was ready. I turned on the light in the bathroom, took off my kimono, opened the window wide, and quietly slipped into the bath. The green leaves of the sweet viburnum poked in through the open window, and each leaf caught the light, gleaming brilliantly. The stars sparkled in the sky. They sparkled no matter how many times I looked back at them. Lying there as I gazed up with rapture, I purposely avoided looking at the paleness of my body, but I was still vaguely aware of it, somewhere in the periphery of my vision. Yet, still silent, I sensed that it was not the same white body as when I was little. I couldn't stand it. The body had no connection to my mind, it developed on its own accord, which was unbearable and bewildering. It made me miserable that I was rapidly becoming an adult and that I was unable to do anything about it. I suppose there is no choice but to give myself over to what is happening, to wait and see as I become a grown up. I want to have a doll-like body forever. I splashed the bathwater about, trying to imitate a child, but I still felt depressed. I was distressed, like there wasn't any reason left to live. From the field across the yard, a child's voice called out tearfully, Sis! It startled me. The voice wasn't calling for me but I envied the sister whom the child was crying out for. If I were her, with such a beloved and cossetted little brother, then I wouldn't live my life so shamefully day after day. I would have the encouragement to live, to dedicate my whole life to my brother—I would be prepared to face any hardship. I would strain hard all on my own, which would make me feel all the more sorry for myself.

After my bath, I went out into the yard, the stars still occupying my mind for some reason tonight. The sky was filled with them. Ah, summer's almost here. I could hear frogs croaking. The barley soughed. No matter

how many times I looked across the sky, the infinite stars continued to gleam. Last year—no, it wasn't last year, it was the year before last already—I had insisted on going for a walk, and even though he wasn't well, Father took a walk with me. Father was always young. He taught me the German song that goes something like, "Until you are 100, until I am 99," and we talked about the stars, and tried to make up impromptu poems. Wonderful Father, walking with a cane, spewing spittle, and blinking his eyes constantly as we walked together. As I looked up at the stars silently, I could remember Father with perfect clarity. In the year or two since then, little by little I had become a horrible girl. I had so many secrets of my own now.

I went back to my room and sat down, chin in hand, and gazed at the lily that was on my desk. It had a lovely perfume. With the scent of lilies around, I could sit like this by myself forever, and never have an impure thought. I had bought this lily from the florist yesterday evening, on my way home from a walk to the station, and since then it seemed to have transformed my room, its refreshing perfume hitting me the moment I slid open the fusuma door. I was immensely comforted by it. Sitting here now, staring at the lily, I was struck with a realization—an actual physical sensation—that it was greater than Solomon's glory. Suddenly I remembered the time when I was in Yamagata last summer. We had gone to the mountains and I was surprised to see an astonishing number of lilies growing halfway up a cliff. It was such a steep precipice, I knew there was no way to climb up there, no matter how much I wanted to—all I could do was look. But there happened to be a miner nearby who quietly clambered up the cliff and, in no time, he collected more lilies than he could carry with both hands. Then, without the least hint of a smile, he handed all of them over to me. There were so many flowers. No one had ever received so many flowers—not on any magnificent stage or at the most extravagant wedding. That was the first time I understood what it's like to feel dizzy from flowers. I could barely manage to carry that enormous white bouquet with my arms open wide—I couldn't see in front of me at all. Such a kind and very admirable young hardworking miner, I wondered what he was doing now. All he had done was bring me some flowers from a hard-to-reach place, but now, whenever I see lilies, I think of the miner.

I opened the desk drawer and rummaged around to find my folding paper fan from last summer. It had a Genroku-era woman waywardly

sprawled on a white background and, next to her, two green Chinese lantern plants had been added. This fan suddenly summoned last summer like a vapor. The days in Yamagata, being on the train, wearing yukata, and watermelon, the river, cicadas, and windchimes. I had a sudden urge to take the fan and get on a train. I like the feeling of opening a fan. The clattering as the ribs unfurled, the sudden lightness. As I played at whirling it around, Mother came home. She was in a happy mood.

"Oh, I'm so tired," she said, but her face belied her words. It was just as well—she liked taking care of other people's business for them.

"It was quite a complicated matter," she went on as she changed out of her kimono and got into the bath.

After her bath, while the two of us were drinking tea together, Mother wore a curious smile, and I wondered what she was about to tell me.

"You know how you said you've been wanting to see The Barefoot Girl? If you really want to go see it, then I'll let you. In exchange, would you rub my shoulders a little tonight? It will make it all the more enjoyable if you have to work for it."

I was overjoyed. Of course I wanted to see the movie, "The Barefoot Girl," but since lately all I'd done was loaf around, I had hesitated. Knowing just how I felt, Mother had given me something to do so that I could go see the film triumphantly. I was so happy, I beamed with love for Mother.

It seemed like it had been a very long time since Mother and I spent the evening like this at home, just the two of us. Mother has such a large number of acquaintances. She tries so hard not to do anything that would incur ridicule. As I massaged her shoulders, I could feel her weariness, as if it were being transferred into my own body. I ought to cherish her, I thought. I felt ashamed about the earlier resentment I had harbored towards Mother when Imaida had been here. I'm sorry, I formed the words softly. I only ever think of myself, I thought, I let myself be coddled by her to my heart's content, and then take such a reckless attitude with her. I can't begin to imagine how hurtful or painful it must be for her, instead I always avoid thinking about it. Mother has really grown weaker, ever since Father had been gone. And look at me—despite always going to Mother with the things that were difficult or unbearable, when Mother depends on me for the slightest thing, I'm appalled, like I've seen something filthy, which is really terribly selfish. Indeed, Mother and I are both as weak as the other. From now on, I would be content with our life, just the two of us, and I

would keep Mother's happiness in mind, bringing up the past and talking about Father, all day long if she liked—I would make Mother the center of my days. This could give me an admirable sense of purpose. In my heart, I worry about Mother and want to be a good daughter, but my words and actions are nothing more than that of a spoiled child. And lately, there hasn't been a single redeeming quality about this childlike me. Only impurity and shamefulness. I go about saying how pained and tormented, how lonely and sad I feel, but what do I really mean by that? If I were to speak the truth, I would die. While I am perfectly aware of what I should do, I can't even utter the words. All I do is feel wretched, and in the end I fly into a rage—I mean, really, it's as if I were crazy. Long ago, women were called slaves, dolls, mere worms with no selfregard, and though bad things may have been said about them, they had a vastly superior sense of femininity than the likes of me, as well as inner reserves and the wisdom to contend with their state of subservience effortlessly. They understood the beauty of genuine self-sacrifice and knew well the pleasure of wholly unrewarded service.

"Ah, my masseuse! You're quite good at this," Mother teased me the way she always did.

"You think so? That's because I did it with all of my heart. But, you know, giving massages isn't my only strongpoint. I'd be so discouraged if it were. There are more good parts of me."

Having uttered the candid thoughts in my head, they sounded rather refreshing, and I realized that for the past two or three years I had felt unable to express myself so clearly and without affectation. I was thrilled by the possibility of a new, calm me, one who had emerged after I had simply accepted my place.

After her massage, I wanted to offer something else as another form of thanks to Mother tonight, so I thought I would read her a passage from Heart. Mother was glad to see me reading this kind of book. The other day when I was reading Belle de Jour by Joseph Kessel, she had calmly taken it from me and glanced at its cover with a dark look, and although she had given it right back to me without saying anything, for some reason I no longer had any interest in reading any further. I'm sure Mother hasn't read Belle de Jour but nevertheless she seemed to have intuited what it was about. In the quiet of the evening, as I read Heart aloud on my own, my voice seemed to echo ridiculously loudly, and at times while I was reading,

I felt foolish and awkward in front of Mother. Because it was so quiet, any silliness seemed conspicuous. Whenever I read Heart, I am as deeply affected as I was when I read it as a child, and I love the way my own heart feels genuinely purified, but somehow reading it aloud seemed quite different from reading it to myself, and the effect unnerved me. Still, Mother cast her eyes downward and wept when I read the parts about Enrico and Garrone. My own mother is as fine and beautiful a mother as Enrico's mother.

Mother went to bed before I did. She had been out and about since early this morning so she must have been exhausted. I fixed her futon for her, pressing the edges of the cover to tuck her in. Mother always falls asleep as soon as she gets into bed.

I then went to do laundry in the bathroom. Lately I've had this strange habit of starting my wash when it's nearly midnight. It seems a shame to waste the daylight hours splattering about, but I suppose maybe it's the other way around. From the window I could see the moon. Crouching as I scrubbed, I smiled softly at the moon. The moon pretended not to see me. At that same moment, I became convinced that somewhere another sad and pitiful girl was doing the wash and smiling softly at this very moon. She was definitely smiling. There she was now, a suffering girl, quietly doing the wash by the back door late at night, in a house at the summit of a mountain in the distant countryside. And there, on the back streets of Paris, in the corridor of a squalid flat, a girl just my age was furtively laundering her things, and smiling at this same moon—I hadn't the slightest doubt, I could see her as clearly as if through a telescope, in distinct and vivid color in my mind. Nobody in the world understood our suffering. In time, when we became adults, we might look back on this pain and loneliness as a funny thing, perfectly ordinary, but—but how were we expected to get by, to get through this interminable period of time until that point when we were adults? There was no one to teach us how. Was there nothing to do but leave us alone, like we had the measles? But people died from the measles, or went blind. You couldn't just leave them alone. Some of us, in our daily depressions and rages, were apt to stray, to become corrupted, irreparably so, and then our lives would be forever in disorder. There were even some who would resolve to kill themselves. And when that happened, everyone would say, Oh, if only she had lived a little longer she would have known, if she were a little more grown up she would have figured it out. How

saddened they would all be. But if those people were to think about it from our perspective, and see how we had tried to endure despite how terribly painful it all was, and how we had even tried to listen carefully, as hard as we could, to what the world might have to say, they would see that, in the end, the same bland lessons were always being repeated over and over, you know, well, merely to appease us. And they would see how we always experienced the same embarrassment of being ignored. It's not as though we only care about the present. If you were to point to a faraway mountain and say, If you can make it there, it's a pretty good view, I'd see that there's not an ounce of untruth to what you tell us. But when you say, Well, bear with it just a little longer, if you can make it to the top of that mountain, you'll have done it, you are ignoring the fact that we are suffering from a terrible stomachache—right now. Surely one of you is mistaken to let us go on this way. You're the one who is to blame.

I finished the washing and straightened up the bathroom, then snuck open the fusuma door and there it was—the lily's perfume. How refreshing. It was as if I had become transparent, to the bottom of my heart, you might even call what I felt a sublime nihility. As I quietly changed into my nightclothes, I was startled when Mother, whom I thought had been fast asleep, suddenly started speaking with her eyes still closed. Mother does this kind of thing sometimes, and it takes me by surprise.

"You said you wanted summer shoes, so I looked for some while I was in Shibuya today. Shoes have gotten expensive, too, haven't they."

"It's okay, I don't really want them anymore."

"But don't you need them?"

"I guess so."

Tomorrow will probably be another day like today. Happiness will never come my way. I know that. But it's probably best to go to sleep believing that it will surely come, tomorrow it will come. I purposely made a loud thump as I fell into bed. Ah, that feels good. The futon was cool, just the right temperature against my back, and it was simply delightful. Sometimes happiness arrives one night too late. The thought occurred to me as I lay there. You wait and wait for happiness, and when finally you can't bear it any longer, you rush out of the house, only to hear later that a marvelous happiness arrived the following day at the home you had abandoned, and now it was too late. Sometimes happiness arrives one night too late. Happiness...

I heard Poo walking around in the yard. Pitter-patter, pitter-patter—Poo's footsteps are distinctive. His right foreleg is a little shorter, and he's bow-legged like a crab, so there is a peculiar sadness to his footsteps. He often wandered around the yard like this in the middle of the night, and I wondered what he was doing. Poo is such a poor thing. I had been mean to him this morning, but tomorrow I would show him some attention.

I have the miserable habit of not being able to fall asleep unless I cover my face completely with both hands. I put my hands over my face and lay there.

Falling asleep is such a strange feeling. It's like a carp or an eel is tugging on a fishing line, or something heavy like a lead weight is pulling on the line that I'm holding with my head, and as I doze off to sleep, the line slackens up a bit. When that happens, it startles me back to awareness. Then it pulls me again. I doze off to sleep. The line loosens a bit again. This goes on three or four times, and then, with the first really big tug, this time it lasts until morning.

Good night. I'm Cinderella without her prince. Do you know where to find me in Tokyo? You won't see me again.